

## A Single Step to English Communication

Author & Publisher: Steven E. Quasha. Akebono Press

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A Single Step to English Communication is a textbook written for A1 to A2 level students (Elementary to Pre-Intermediate) on the CEFR scale (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). It is used for a 90-minute, 15-week, basic English conversation course at a commercial business university in Japan.

This 15-unit textbook encompasses a variety of topics such as part-time jobs, fashion advice, music, movies, and dining out. According to the author, the aim of the textbook is to help students to become more confident in using practical English inside and outside of the classroom. Each unit consists of approximately 10 pages and is subdivided into a plethora of short activities which are systematically repeated in each unit. Those sections are as follows: introduction, vocabulary, pair practice, useful expressions, conversation, listening, comprehension check, role play, substitution drill, expansion activity, pair discussion, pronunciation practice, pair practice, group work, discussion review, writing example, grammar focus, unit review and culminates finally with a Can Do/self-reflection section. With such a wide variety of activities, instructors can select the sections that best fit the needs of their students.

For year-long courses, Quasha has designed this textbook so that units 1-7 can be covered in the spring term (April to July) with topics such as part-time jobs and summer vacation. Likewise, units 8-15 can be used in the fall term since they cover

fall/winter topics of Halloween, holiday seasons, and new year's celebratory activities. At the beginning of most units, there are activities such as fill-in-the-missing words, pronunciation and an English-Japanese matching section that introduces new terminology and vocabulary. These sections can be done in class as warm-up activities or they can be easily assigned for homework for the following class. Regarding the actual listening activities, each unit has on average 3-4 QR codes that allow students to listen to supplementary material that is narrated by the author on YouTube. For example, in the first unit, the author explains how to use the expression 'I am not sure' in a slow and deliberate manner so that students can understand the gist of his monologue. The video is also used to highlight key expressions and other alternative expressions such as: 'I have not thought about it' and 'I have no idea.'

For students who may need additional supportive material, there is a brief summary of the content of the video in the description section under each video. As of this writing, the first video has been viewed over 4600 times since 2017. One advantage of having the videos on YouTube is that students can individually adjust the playback speed from 0.25x to 2X. Additionally, students can turn on the closed caption (CC) function and subtitles will appear at the bottom of the screen in English. Using a familiar platform such as YouTube will appeal to some students who may prefer a customizable audio/visual presentation of new information. Besides the self-created, personalized YouTube material, this textbook also has short, traditional audio material that can be streamed and downloaded from the publisher's website.

Like many textbooks, the first couple of activities gently ease the students into the topic. Less stressful activities such as matching vocabulary words, listening and filling in the blanks all help to make the task of introducing new topics less intimidating for students. As we progress toward the middle of the unit and students start to feel more comfortable with the topic, Quasha increases the amount of student-to-student interaction. Students are now encouraged to check and exchange

answers briefly with their classmates. As the lesson progresses however, the reading/speaking time per student tends to increase which connects to Anderson's belief that 'output is necessary development' (Anderson, 2016). As such, Quasha has incorporated traditional tried-and-true activities such as substitution drills, expansion activities, pair discussion, pair practice and group work.

Finally, at the end of each unit, there is a writing section where students can create a list of new English words/phrases and their meanings. Students are also asked to fill in a self-reflection Can Do section. One criticism of this textbook would be that there are too many sections and subsections in each unit. At a glance, one might feel overwhelmed with all the supplementary material that is available. Although there are many subsections in each unit the same activities are basically repeated throughout the textbook which helps students to focus more on the content of the lesson and they don't have to waste time figuring out what they are supposed to be doing. One additional criticism is that many of the fluency tasks are quite controlled so this textbook might be more appropriate for false beginners. Higher-level students might feel some activities to be a bit too restrictive.

In addition to the textbook, the Single Step English workbook (co-authored by Anton Vogel) is a supplementary resource to help students review the textbook vocabulary/phrases and identify common grammar mistakes. The writing exercises included in the workbook serve as valuable pedagogical tools to enhance students' language acquisition while simultaneously providing additional opportunities for pairwork communication during class.

What distinguishes this textbook from others is that Quasha has designed it from the bottom up. The author collected data from students regarding scenarios where they are most likely to use English. In so doing, Quasha has successfully created meaningful and engaging material for young adults.

Generally speaking, the layout of the textbook is straightforward and attractive enough for young adults. For example, small colorful photos are strategically placed to help students visualize new words and concepts. Given the fact that all students do not learn a new language the same way, it is difficult to design a perfect textbook. However, in terms of needs, goals, skills and TESOL methodologies both students and teachers should be able to find enough meaningful material in each unit. Just like with any other textbook, instructors in principle will ultimately have four options: reject, adopt, adapt or supplement.

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## References

- Anderson, J., Graham-Marr, A., Howser, R., & Sato, A. (2016). *New TOEIC skills*. Tokyo: Abax ELT Publishers
- Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge.